

Senate gives final passage to contested surveillance bill

WASHINGTON, USA: The US Senate on Thursday, 18 January 2018, gave final congressional approval to a bill extending a fiercely contested program giving national security agencies broad authority to intercept private electronic communications.



© Sergey Nvens – 123RF.com

The 65-34 vote approved the so-called Section 702 authority of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, sending the measure for President Donald Trump's signature. The House of Representatives approved the same bill last week.

US national security officials have argued they need this authority to be able to monitor online threats and thwart attacks on the United States and its allies.

But civil liberties activists have claimed the law - which became the topic of heated public debate after revelations in 2013 by former national security contractor Edward Snowden - opened the door to widespread surveillance of innocent Americans' emails and other online communications.

Although the law is intended to target foreign threats, Snowden's revelations showed how data from unsuspecting Americans could be scooped up in "incidental" collection without the need for individual warrants.

The American Civil Liberties Union said the reauthorization "extends - and risks expanding - unconstitutional spying

powers" of the government.

"We are currently challenging warrantless surveillance under Section 702 and will continue to fight this unlawful surveillance in the courts," the ACLU said in a tweet shortly after passage.

US Attorney General Jeff Sessions said the bill is "crucial to allowing us to continue to gather intelligence on foreign terrorists overseas and foil potential plots against Americans abroad and at home."

Trump himself last week initially suggested he opposed the measure, saying in a tweet that the section 702 provision had been used by the Obama administration to "so badly surveil and abuse the Trump campaign."

More than an hour later, he reversed himself, saying the bill "is about foreign surveillance of foreign bad guys on foreign land. We need it!"

Source: AFP

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>